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ABSTRACT

In light of the many thousands of displaced workers in Michigan, a program was developed to help laid-off workers assess their capabilities, relate their skills to job market needs, overcome the grief resulting from job loss, learn how to approach prospective employers, and successfully market their abilities. The 3-month program was offered at plant sites, union classrooms, or in community-based training centers. The delivery methods included presenters trained to introduce and lead discussions and group counseling sessions and peer facilitators selected by their unions and trained to work with participants, to spot problems, and to model target behavior. Several successful program criteria were identified: (1) length of 6 to 10 weeks; (2) accurate, broad-based labor information; (3) focus on interviewing skills; (4) social or monetary inducements to participate; (5) delivery variables including group process and films; (6) training in resume skills; (7) skilled presenters; (8) self-analysis; (9) referral to community resources; (10) program evaluation; (11) comfortable physical setting and warm atmosphere; and (12) support during job finding phase. Problems include insufficient screening of guest speakers and inadequate interview practice. (ABL)

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RE-EMPLOYMENT OF DISPLACED WORKERS:

WHAT DOES AND DOESN'T WORK

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RE-EMPLOYMENT OF DISPLACED WORKERS: WHAT DOES AND DOESN'T WORK

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Background

The re-employment of many thousands of workers in the State of Michigan is a vital need. At Oakland University a program was developed by nine faculty and staff members which helped laid-off workers to assess their capabilities, relate their skills to job market needs, overcome their grief resulting from job loss, learn how to approach prospective employers, and successfully market their abilities. The program included job search skills and practice, exploration for placement in vocational and technical education or on-the-job training opportunities and effective utilization of tuition benefits available through agreements between employers and unions.

The program drew upon eighteen of the most successful practices which have been used in recent programs for the unemployed. The approach of the program followed a carefully sequenced process which brought displaced workers from a state which may have included depression and indecision to an attitude of self confidence with a clear understanding of their personal work/life alternatives and feasible career plans. Also, special assistance was provided for older workers and their spouses to explore the option or necessity of retirement.

The program was offered in plant-site or union classroom locations set up by employers and/or unions, in cooperation with various departments at the university, or in community-based re-employment training centers where resources were available for job search activities and training. Three months

covered the time from the first planning meetings for outreach and recruitment to the final operation of a fully functioning job club and the placement of participants in a job, education, or training.

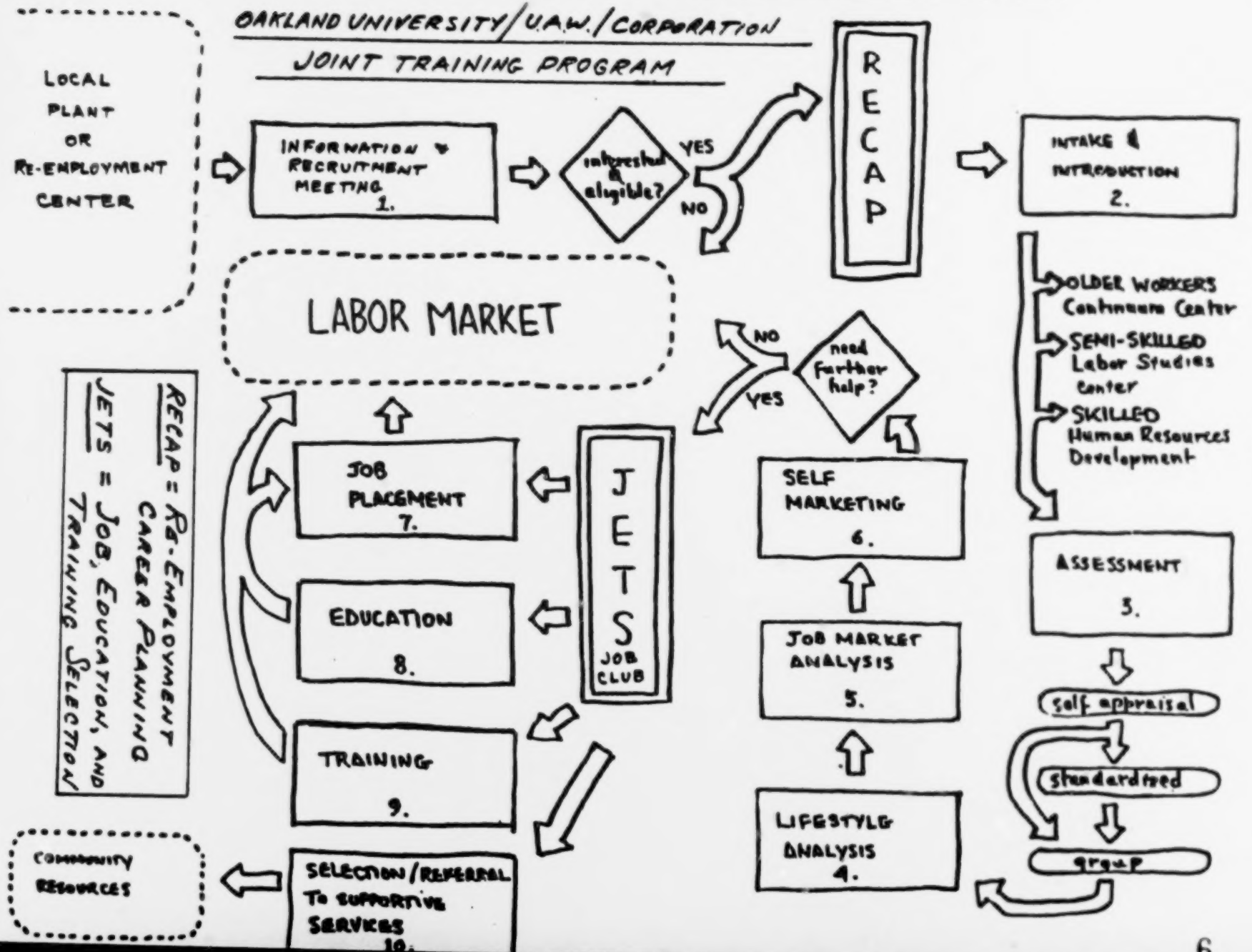
Program Components

The Oakland University program was titled "RECAP/JETS", which refers to two parts:

1. Re-employment Career Planning (RECAP) is a three week program meeting three days per week, which covered instructional exercises in the following four broad categories.
   a. Job search skill development
   b. Self-awareness and general skill assessment
   c. Career awareness and job market information
   d. Decision making and planning
2. Job/Education/Training Selection (JETS) followed for an additional three weeks with time structured around participant interests.
   a. Assessment (group and individual) tailored to specific needs and interests.
   b. Job campaign and search activities for out-placement
   c. Educational exploration (community colleges, vocational schools and adult education)
   d. On-the-job training exploration
   e. Survey interviews with personnel recruiters in small groups or pairs
   f. Job search within the corporation (from which laid off) for in-placement

CHART OF CLIENT FLOW AND PROGRAM COMPONENT RELATIONSHIP

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY/U.A.W./CORPORATION JOINT TRAINING PROGRAM



g. Periodic warm-up, stress management, review, goal setting, and information exchange/group support sessions

h. Community referral resources counseling

(See Figure 1: chart of client flow and program component relationship.)

The developers of the program were from the following units within the School of Human and Educational Services:

The Human Resources Development Area Faculty

The Ken Morris Labor Studies Center

The Continuum Center for Adult Counseling

The faculty and staff from these units have extensive experience in adult development and are known nationally for the programs which they deliver. Their work includes the professional preparation of specialists to serve in personnel training, employability/career development, job placement, vocational-technical settings and related action research.

Trainer and Peer Facilitator Teams

The program utilized two special methods of delivery. One method is a "train-the-trainers" approach. The "stand-up" presenters of the various RECAP/JETS training exercises were recruited and trained to introduce and lead learning discussions and group counseling sessions. Two co-trainers were prepared to work with each group of 30-40 participants. The trainers were chosen for their experience in guidance and counseling, adult education, union programs, and background in work with workers in industry and other settings.

The second delivery method, which has proven to be essential, is the use of peer facilitators selected by the union from among the laid-off workers. These individuals demonstrated leadership and interpersonal skills and were respected by their co-workers. Five to six facilitators were trained to work

with each group of 30-40 participants. Their role was to work with small groups carrying out the exercises and learning experiences structured by the trainers. In addition, the facilitators maintained close contacts with participants to insure attendance, to spot problems needing counseling attention and to model target behavior.

The training of the RECAP/JETS delivery teams was covered in two weeks. The faculty and staff familiarized the new trainers with the training goals, materials and methods during the first three days. The facilitators and trainers then participated in two days of small group process skill training. This served the function of giving peer facilitators additional skills while acquainting both groups with each other. During the second week, the faculty and staff supervised the delivery of key exercises in the program to the facilitators. This served as a trial run for the trainers and prepared the facilitators for their role on a delivery team.

The teams of trainers and peer facilitators then conducted the RECAP/JETS program to the rest of the participants during a scheduled six-week period. University faculty and staff were present to coach and de-brief the delivery teams each day and to administer the program with the assistance of a site coordinator who represented the organizations being served.

CRITERIA FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Our experience and review of literature yield a number of criteria for job training program success:

a. Length over several weeks, preferably 6-10 weeks. Not much can happen in three days or one week.

b. Labor market information must be given which is

-accurate

-up-to-date

-covers a wide range of occupations

c. Focus on interview skills

-models

-video practice (need plenty of equipment)

-live practice outside, preferably with employers

d. Inducements to participate. A stipend is helpful but not necessary; we can't over emphasize social attraction. If they like you, they'll come from miles. This may sound crass, but men will travel great distances to get in the company of attractive women--and vice versa. An attraction can be just coffee and donuts, this sets a different atmosphere and creates a relaxed informal dimension otherwise not attainable.

e. Delivery variables

-Use group process

-Much doing, little listening

-Peer involvement. Our program used peer leaders to recruit and deliver the program, providing day-to-day support for participants.

-Variety of activities: films, role plays, small group video taping, field work, stress management activities, guest speakers, handouts

f. Train in resume and job application skills. These can be the heart of self skills exploration.

g. Staff trainers must be skilled. ("Unflappable") Good presenters, non-defensive, empathic, skilled in group leadership, and calm. Reason: they have to model for everyone and handle blowups, breakdowns, foulups, bleeps and blunders.

h. Program should involve participants in self analysis: Interests, aptitudes, reading/writing/math, skills and strengths.

i. The community resources - experience training/education, but also supportive services - psychiatric, medical, legal. A counselor can be useful in individual consultation and referral to community resources.

j. Program should evaluate itself - multiple measures, strong research design, longitudinal to get long term measures of effects.

k. Physical setting: As comfortable and uptown as possible, with closeness between clients and leaders - e.g., no separate eating facilities.

l. Psychological atmosphere: Warm, friendly, among equals, genuine concern, respect.

m. Support during job funding phase. We used Job Club format and recommend it, but other methods may work. The issue is to give support during very difficult, ego-busting period - deflecting attention from getting a job to conducting good interviews helps.

Things which didn't work well

The program components which gave us problems and which we would change in another go round are:

1. Insufficient screening of some guest speakers. The participants complained about two of our invited presenters -- one was

inexcusably uninformed and could not respond to questions regarding benefits and legal issues. Another was unfortunately disrespectful to the laid off workers and lectured them on dress and comportment in dealing with his bureaucracy. If guest speakers are to be used, program designers should be sure through first hand experience that such fiascos are avoided.

2. The VIESA test: We spent considerable time and money on this instrument, which appealed to us with its attractive format and sound theoretical basis. The "map" which accompanies the test interpretation proved irresistable to us when designing the program. Alas, the activity was generally panned by participants and didn't seem to lead to greater self awareness or career commitment. Some of this may be the fault of the program designers, who decreed mass, rather than selective testing. With this group, the testing was not successful. In planning a program we recomend testing only carefully selected participants and using instruments designed for adults.

3. Interview practice. The problem had to do with a lack of sufficient equipment and time allotted to this important activity. Participants, peer facilitators and trainers all recommend strengthening this component and more opportunity to rehearse job interviews.

4. An activity called "Geographic preferences" which focused upon where the participant might consider relocating to find another job. It turned out that none of our participants was willing to leave southeastern Michigan and only a few would even consider a long commute.

5. Unwillingness to depart from the scheduled program. In some cases, especially early in the program, we stuck doggedly with activities and a schedule which was at odds with reality and participants' needs/interests. It can prove a trap deadly to program effectiveness. Certain activities needed stretching; others, cutting. As the program moved along, we became more flexible, modifying and innovating, including everyone in debriefing and planning sessions. We counsel not becoming overenamoured of the schedule and/or workbook. We often scheduled too little time for key activities.

These comments are related to process variables and are collected from a "clinical" point of view; from participant, peer facilitator, trainer and consultant conferences. As we shall see from the outcome data reported by Professor Ramey (cited below) these insights are often confirmed.

Recommended Reading

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